



# The Sacramento Bee

## **Fabian Núñez: Cuts-only budget is not the answer**

By Fabian Núñez  
January 16, 2008

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget is what some conservatives have been advocating for a long time – a cuts-only approach that slashes every service Californians utilize, depend on or support.

That includes public schools and universities, law enforcement, health care, and services for the poor and the elderly, blind and disabled. It will take creativity – and no small measure of courage – to turn this proposal into a final budget that better reflects the values and aspirations of the people of California.

Layoffs and the closing of schools are real possibilities, and the proposed cuts to schools also extend to special education, class-size reduction and career technical education, to name only a few.

The cuts-only approach also would close 48 state parks and beaches. Reporters keep asking if this budget is DOA. KOA is more like it, because under a cuts-only philosophy, we can all look forward to paying private contractors for the privilege of visiting our coast and campgrounds.

The proposed budget would also imprudently result in California forfeiting hundreds of millions of dollars back to the federal government that we can no longer match, particularly in the area of health care. How do we make the case for California ever getting our fair share from the feds if we blithely turn away what little money is coming our way?

Following the release of the budget proposal, local leaders quickly began trying to anticipate the impact on their communities from the proposed early release of thousands of state prison inmates to accommodate cuts to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's budget.

Even after all these drastic – and permanent – cuts, the administration still estimates there would be a future shortfall of close to \$3 billion. Add that to the fact that since 2004-'05, we have already made \$12 billion in spending cuts, and the rhetoric that the state simply has a "spending problem" gets a big dose of reality.

Those \$12 billion in cuts we've made were painful to the people who depended on the services and to Democrats who had to vote for the cuts because the state's two-thirds vote requirement to pass a budget made any other course impossible. Painful as it was, Democrats weren't willing to

abdicate our responsibility and hold the state hostage by withholding votes on a budget. It's time for some responsibility on the other side.

Any budget that only continues the failed approach of cutting and borrowing doesn't get the job done. A resurrected spending cap that doesn't address the deficit we face doesn't get the job done. A constitutional rainy day fund on top of the existing constitutional rainy day fund that we haven't had a chance to implement doesn't get the job done.

What will get the job done? First, we need a responsible commitment to look at everything it takes to keep our fiscal house in order. To me, closing tax loopholes makes a lot more sense than penalizing children. And blind pledges to never raise any tax at any time is an economic straitjacket that ill fits California's needs.

In the coming months at community meetings throughout the state and in budget hearings in the Capitol, Democrats will be committed to leading a real conversation with the people of California about the kind of state we want, the kind of state we want to leave our children and the steps we're willing to take to get there. The results of that conversation will determine whether our budgets will balance with our values.